

# View-Master Scenic Reels

By J. Clement  
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View-Master was originally conceived as a replacement for the Tru-View films and older Holmes cards which mainly marketed travelogues. William Gruber, the inventor of View-Master, and Howard Graves, president of Sawyers, first traveled around the US making stereo photographs for the new format. Unlike the older formats, all of the pictures were in color. This was possible because Kodak started marketing Kodachrome in 1935, the first successful color film marketed to amateurs.

The early 3D cards served as means for people to armchair travel to places around the world. They opened up scenes that people could not visit. Viewing them could be a family event. They became popular when Oliver Wendell Holmes invented his stereoscope in 1861. Joseph L. Bates subsequently marketed improvements to the device. Many of the Civil War photos by Matthew Brady were marketed in 3D for this device. It continued in use until around 1839 as the most popular stereo viewer.

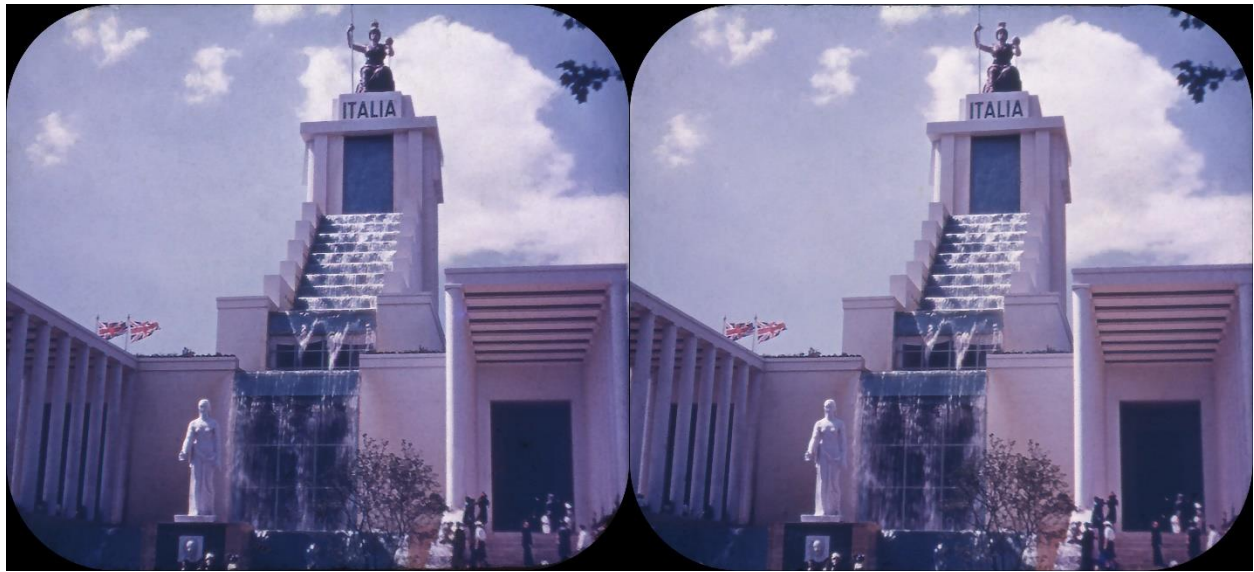
Tru-View was the next popular stereoscope created in 1932. It used 35mm black and white film and could display several images in a row. It also features many scenics but had some children's pictures.

In 1940 View-Master debuted at the N.Y. World's Fair and was a success. At first only scenics were marketed, but in 1946 a series of fairy tales by unknown Hollywood artists were created. View-Master hired a series of artists to create children's stories which became hot sellers. With the acquisition of Tru-View in 1951, View-Master was able to make scenes from the Disney catalog. Along with purely children's stories View-Master also created reels from popular movies and TV shows.

At the same time, View-Master created many reels of attractions in the U.S. and around the world. Often reels were marketed at the attractions as a way to relive the experience. The sheer number of scenic reels probably dwarfs the children's reels. It is not possible in a short article to sample more than a small number of the available scenics. These reels in 2020 now serve as vivid time travel where we can see how things used to look in the past 70 years.



1940 88A 1 New York World's Fair - General View  
Photo by Harold Graves



1940 87A 1 New York World's Fair - Italian Building  
Photo by Harold Graves



1940 89B 6 New York World's Fair USA II - Night on Constitutional Mall  
The statues represent the four freedoms by Leo Friedlander.  
Photo by Harold Graves

These pictures show scenes from the N.Y. World's fair where View-Master made its official debut. These early scenes were first marketed on 4 reels 86 to 89. Later they were condensed to 2 reels 88, 89. Unfortunately they do not have pictures from the debut. The scenes are all good quality, but often with violations of the stereo window. The extreme pop-out in some scenes diminishes the depth and makes viewing sometimes confusing. This was a very popular set of reels when it first came out. The attribution comes from "View-Master Memories".



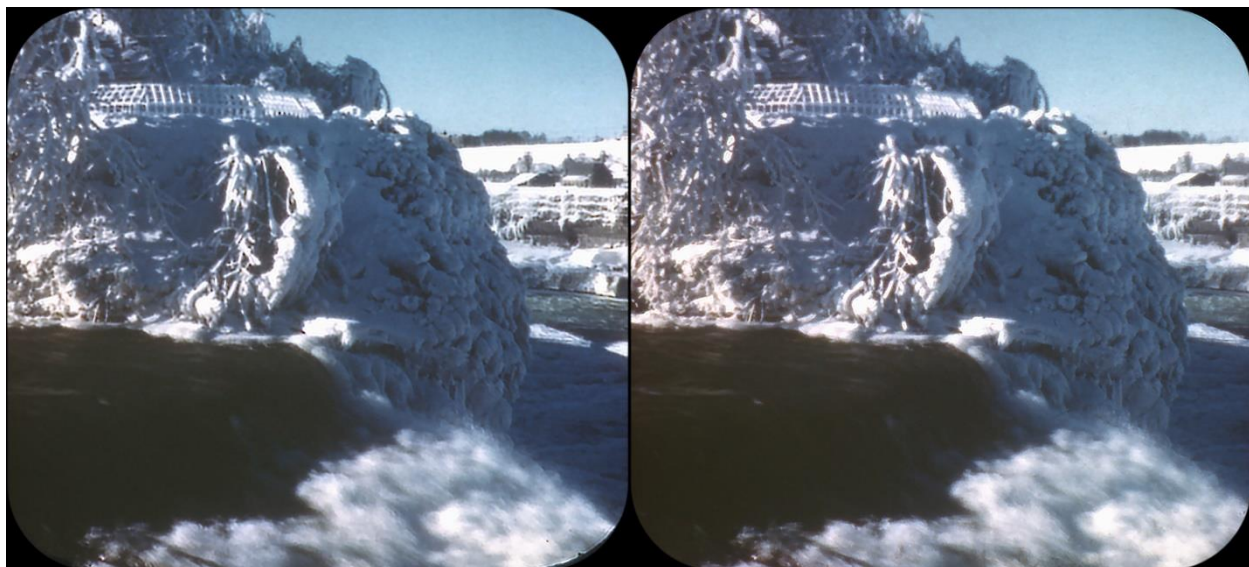


1946 9008 6 Hoover Dam - Arizona Spillway



1954 132 4 Yosemite Nat'l Park II - Half Dome and Merced River

Boulder Dam, later renamed Hoover Dam, first appeared on reels 4-11 in 1939-1940. Reel 9008 was designed to be sold in the gift shop at the attraction and is apparently a reissue of #4. Yosemite originally appeared on reels 131-133 in 1939-1940. These pictures were taken from reels with later dates, but the original pictures were probably taken by Harold Graves probably around 1940. So these pictures most probably all date from 1939-1940. According to the book "View-Master Memories" by Mary Ann and Wolfgang Sell, Harold Graves photographed nearly all of the earliest scenics in the U.S. The World's Fair pictures were specifically attributed.



Circa 1940 82 Niagara Falls in Winter 5 Winter magic at Bridal falls



1948 128 Yellowstone, Old Faithful Area 1 'Old Faithful' erupts every hour

Niagara falls originally appeared on reels 81 and 82. Yellowstone appeared on reels 126 to 129 and both appear later in three reel packets. The Niagara falls in winter reel shows a glimpse of this site when few visitors are present. These early reels all allow viewers to see iconic scenes without the current horde of tourists. The dates are the printed dates on the reels, but these reel numbers were released without dates in 1939-1940, so the scenes probably date from around 1940 probably taken by Harold Graves.





1948 26 Grand Canyon, South Rim-I 3 Hopi Indians



1948 26 Grand Canyon, South Rim-I 6 Canyon Storm



1948 30 Grand Canyon, Bright Angel Trail 6 Above Devil's Corkscrew



1948 36 Grand Canyon North Rim 5 'Bambi'

The original Grand Canyon series spanned reels 26 to 36 and were probably some of the most popular scenics. They were reissued as three reel packets and also appeared in other packets such as the Science Series. Unfortunately the size of the canyon makes the far walls appear in one plane, but the foreground details artfully create the sense of sheer size and depth. These reels were released originally in 1939-1940, but these pictures were taken from the 1948 release. They were probably photographed by Harold Graves.





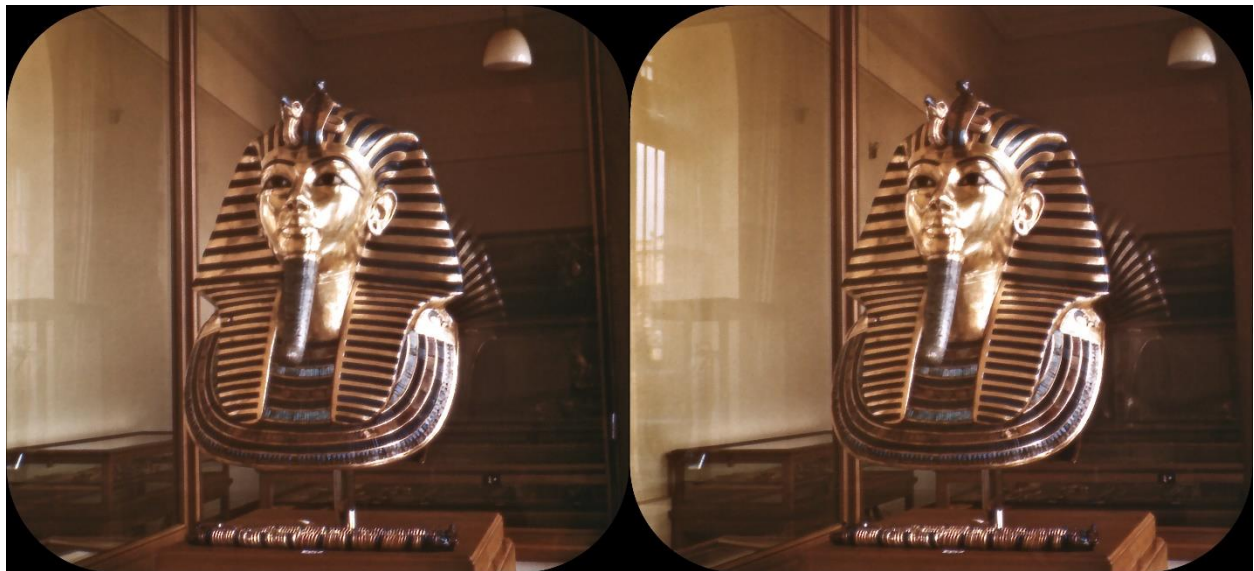
1950 3301 Cairo, Egypt 2 The citadel and mosque of Mohammed Ali



1950 3303 Pyramids 1 The 3 pyramids



1950 3304 Tombs of Kings, Thebes 3 –  
Wall Paintings, King Tut-Anhk-Amen's burial chamber (1400 BC)

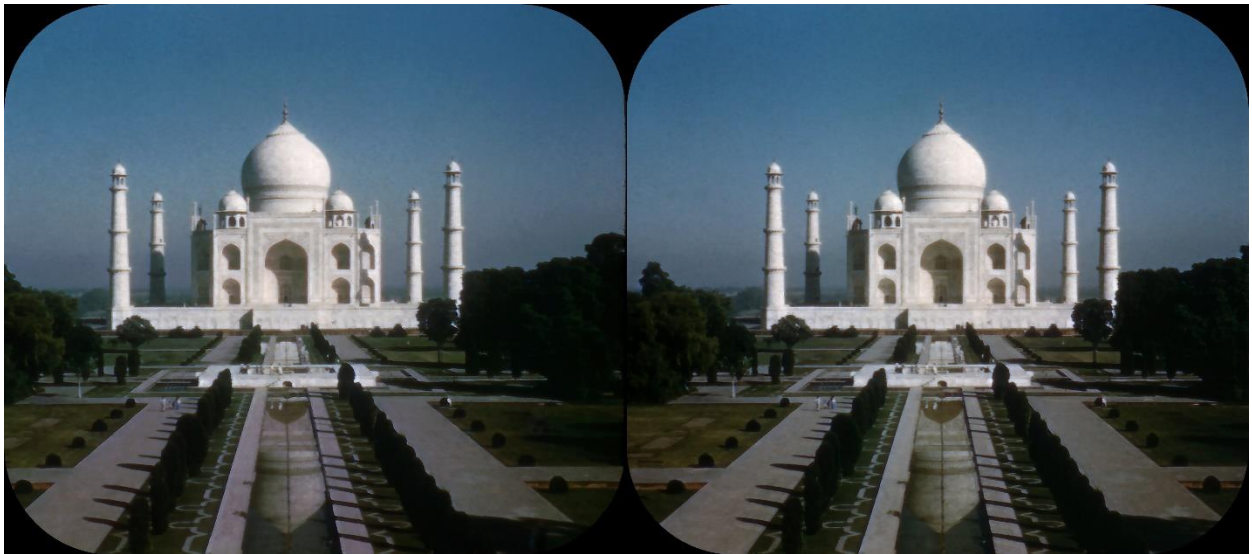


1950 3305 Treasures of King Tut-Ankh-Amen 2 - Solid gold death mask

The Egypt series covers reels 3301-3312 and excerpts were later reissued as three reel packets. The original reels cover most ancient sites except Abu Simbal. Some of the reels such as the “Treasures” and “Tombs” give you pictures in 3D that you can not make yourself. The Cairo museum, and the Valley of the Kings forbid entry of any photographic devices. At this date the King Tut tomb may also be closed to tourists.

“Tutankamun; The Boy King” was a three reel set in the 1978 that featured a variety of flat pictures posed at various depths and a few true 3D pictures of artifacts. Unfortunately due to a switch to an inferior film all of the pictures have turned magenta. Most of the flat pictures are available on the web.





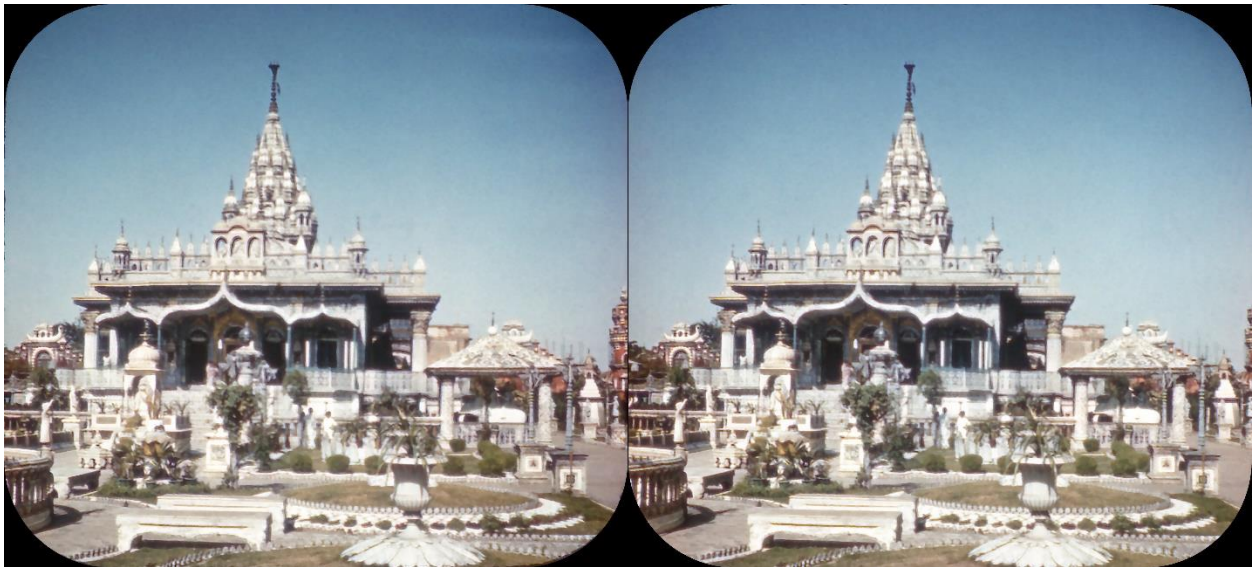
1952 4300 Taj Mahal 2 Seen from Great Gateway



1952 4300 Taj Mahal 5 Tombs of Shah Jahan & Queen Arjmand Banu



1952 4302 Maharaja's Festival, Mysore 2 His Highness mounts festival horse 3D



1952 4305 Calcutta 3 Jain Temple





1952 4309 Dances of India 2 Srinigar Kathak dance

The original India series spanned reels 4300-4353 or a total of 28 reels. Some number sequences were skipped. Some of the reels featured celebrities such as Nehru or Indian movie stars. Selections were reissued as various three reel packets. Some of the reels such as the Taj Mahal show interior scenes well lit without hordes of tourists. Currently the interior scenes can not be appreciated in person because of the dim lighting and mobs of tourists. Photography inside is not allowed, but that restriction seems to be roundly ignored.



1953 C197 Mont St Michel, France 07 Le Mont à la tombée de la nuit



1953 C197 Mont St Michel, France 19 Intérieur de l'église abbatiale

These pictures were originally published as 2 reels in French numbered 1931, 1933, and then later as a three reel packet.



1955 161A Silver Springs Florida 5 Feeding fish from glass bottom boat





1955 164A Beautiful Cypress Gardens Florida 2  
A rustic bridge arches across a winding waterway



1955 166 Marine Studios, Marineland Florida 6 Feeding porpoises by mouth

These attractions in Florida have all been radically altered. Silver Springs is now a state park, while Cypress Gardens is Legoland. Some of the beautiful walks are still there, but the Southern belles are made of legos. Marineland is no longer a commercial park and as of this article belongs to the Georgia Aquarium. It has educational programs and some shows. All of these attractions were available as 3 reel packets.



1955 C411 Heidelberg 03 Reprechtsbau ältester Scholssteil



1960 C411 Neckartal 01 Neckarsteinach

These reels were published by the Belgium View-Master plant. Originally they were published as 2 individual reels of Heidelberg and later with more pictures as a Belgium three reel pack "Heidelberg und Neckartal" The highlight of the set is the romantic ruined Heidelberg castle.





1959 376C 4 Canadian National Exhibition Toronto, Canada - The Prince's Gate

This gate was constructed to be the formal entrance to the exhibition celebrating the diamond jubilee of confederation. When Prince Edward and George visited the name was changed and they cut the ribbon.

This is a series of four single reels taken around Ontario Canada. There are also versions with the same numbering from 1946, so most pictures were probably from that date or a bit later. They all were dated 1959. Parts of these reels were incorporated into 3 reel packets.



1959 378 2 Ottawa, Ontario, Canada - Royal Canadian mounted police



1959 Tx379A 3 Thousand Islands, Ontario, Canada & New York, USA - Zavikon Island & (not) Shortest Bridge

This reel features scenes from the 1000 Islands in the US & Canada. Zavikon Island is touted by guides as having the shortest international bridge, but both islands are in Canada.



1959 Tx379B 6 Kingston & Old Fort Henry, Ontario Canada - Rideau Canal locks

Fort Henry was designed to protect Canada from U.S. invasion, but never saw any action. It is now a tourist attraction. The canal was also constructed as a precaution against U.S. invasion, but is now mainly a tourist waterway complete with hand operated locks.





Circa early 1960s A6341 Dutch Wonderland 02 Whale boats on Magic Lake



A6341 Dutch Wonderland 05 Gingerbread house in Lollipop Land

This three reel packet is essentially advertising for this amusement park which was created in 1963 in Pennsylvania. The second picture shows nearby farmland in the distance. It is still in operation in 2017.



1967 B2281 05 Mecca - The Ka'ba, sacred "cube," rests in Haram Mosque's inner court



1967 B2282 10 Mecca - Barren valley in Mina becomes tent city for four days

This packet was mainly sold in Europe to Mecca pilgrims. It follows the journey of one pilgrim. This is the only way most people can see these sights because non-Moslems are forbidden to go there. Before Islam and in its early days Christians also venerated these sites. Recent pilgrims may find these scenes historically interesting because Mecca has seen many changes since 1967. The text accompanying the packet was edited by Drew Pearson.





1973 D1271 01 Safari - Photographic big-game hunt in the savannah,  
Getting close to the big game



1973 D1273 21 Safari - Cheeta family

The Safari packet was published in Belgium and has minimal captions. If it had more information, it might qualify as a science series packet. It follows a photographic safari with nice pictures of wild animals as well as the “hunters”. Neither the photographer nor participants are credited.

Some historical information is from the Wikipedia. Most scenics were created before 1978 when View-Master still used Kodachrome, so most of them are available used in good color.

All photographs were digitized and restored by J. Clement.



The variety of scenic reels is huge and you can only get a small taste in this article. There are indices of View-Master reels on the web that list most of them. Harry zur Kleinsmiede authored “View-Master Reels & Packets” volumes 1 and 2 which is an exhaustive list of reels with details about them. Historical information about View-Master came from “View-Master Memories” by Mary Anne & Wolfgang Sell, Charley VanPelt.

Collecting all of the scenes of a particular site is difficult because reel reissues often substituted some different pictures. Different issues of three reel packs may have different scenes but the same name. For example the Heidelberg three reel pack omits some scenes from one of the single reels, while adding new scenes.



Circa 1960s Harold Graves, president of Sawyers.  
He also took most of the earliest US pictures  
Photo courtesy of Wolfgang Sell



Circa 1960s William Gruber, inventor of View-Master  
Photo courtesy of Wolfgang Sell  
Gruber's greatest photo contribution is probably the Atlas of anatomy.